



# Borders Mission Circuit

Part of the Methodist Church of Great Britain



The **Methodist** Church 

## Dear Friends in the Borders Mission Circuit

## Ministers Weekly message

3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020 (Psalm 23 & John 10:1-10) 'The Shepherd and The Gate that opens in and out.'



Jesus said: **"I am the Gate for the sheep."** Look at this picture of a 'unusual' gate (taken by Karen D, St. John's) you see there is no surrounding wall or fence! Maybe that is a good illustration for us to reflect on. Currently our church doors/gates are closed, but we know, especially now, that the church is never all about the building. All of US are The Church, by our actions, phone calls checking on each other, errands, letters posted, the time to pray and read at home as individuals or as part of a collective Zoom worship. If we think of a Gate in ancient eastern sheepfolds, the shepherd is the Gate, he lies down at night to stop predators getting in, keeping the sheep safe. Just like God who watches our going out and coming in. Jesus calls himself the Gate;

His right to grant entry to good pastures. A church as a gate? Doors/gates are open 2-ways, come in & go out.

Any institution, including Churches have 'gatekeepers'-stewards, treasurers, preachers, ministers, could be a committee. This can be a positive, as we open our gates and welcome everyone, or sadly it can be a negative. Gatekeepers can copy a 'bouncer/public event steward' who guard keenly and keep watch of what is done and who we let in or not? But actually ALL of us can be *Gate-people*, by that I mean *Gate-openers*. Far better to be a gate opener. Jesus was clear who he was and what he was about. Jesus is The Way into the fold, but the fuller life that God offers cannot just be taken. There is a particular way, of faith and discipleship, into the life that God offers. Are our Faith and Spiritual gates well oiled, checked, and ready to open in and out?

Mary (John ch20) 'saw' but did not believe because she didn't *recognise* Jesus. When **she heard Jesus' voice**, she **believed**. ("**my sheep listen to my voice**" as we read in John 10:4) Mary needed sensory help (**hearing** the voice) for her to be able to **recognise and believe**.

We are familiar with the imagery of the Good shepherd in **Psalm 23**. The "still waters" and "green pastures", which are beautiful images, and it may be that you want to ponder on the image of the God who "restores [your] soul" Psalm 23 according to Walter Bruggeman is in the category of Psalms of *Reorientation*, those Psalms that written after a time of despair and hopelessness. When life has settled down again. What is important in these Psalms is that the world – and God -- now looks different. Now, in the times we are in, it may feel different and that we are in *Dis-orientation*. Perhaps you might like to ponder this version of Psalm 23, '**Psalm 23(ish) by Paula Gooder, Bible Society 2016**:'

*The Lord takes care of me, I have everything I need, He finds places where I can find deep rest and provides refreshment in a safe place. He brings me back to life and makes sure I stay on the straight and narrow, So even though I walk in deep, dark alleyways, I won't fear what lurks there, because you are with me, your presence gives me the courage I need. You invite me to a slap up feast-while my enemies watch. You give me honour and luxury. Your goodness and love chase me down-so I'll come home, I'll serve you, worship and praise you until my dying day.*



Peter Taylor on behalf of Rev Loraine, Rev Ann, Rev Nicola, Deacon Sam and Rev Peter

And two contributions from Swanwick, firstly from Frank Shears and then a meditation from Margaret Lee

Following on last week's thought on Thomas, the doubting disciple. I was pleasantly surprised to find my thoughts echoed those in the Methodist Bible study notes discussion on the Methodist Church Website by a quotation from Pope St Gregory the Great, Holy Father 590-604. What conclusion, dear friends, do you come to? Surely it was not by chance that this chosen disciple was missing in the first place? It was by divine dispensation and not by chance that things fell out". As a result, Jesus was able to utter those words of blessing for future hearers and readers like you and me. "Because you have seen you have believed, BLESSED are those who have not seen and yet have believed"

Earlier in the week I had been reading the story of Abraham and his call to sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis 22. A brief sentence stood out for me. "And the two of them went on together". In answer to God's call Abraham and Isaac and two servants set out and after three days arrived at a place where Abraham saw the place of sacrifice in the distance. There Abraham told his servants to stay here, whilst I and the boy go over there, we will worship then we will come back to you.

And so, the two of them went on together. Isaac with his questions, and no doubt his fears and anxieties and Abraham, knowing to a certain extent what to do and determined to fulfil what God asked of him. In our present situation many are anxious and fearful, wondering what the future will bring, confused by the many conflicting thoughts and suggestions. Some indeed, may be sorrowing in the loss of a loved one and unable to lay them to rest, but we can all be assured

That God is alongside us. He is walking together with us. May we too (two) go on together with The Lord. God bless you this Easter time.

### **PRAYER/MEDITATION "THERE IS A TIME FOR EVERYTHING AND A SEASON FOR EVERY ACTIVITY UNDER HEAVEN" (Ecclesiastes 3 v 1):**

This is a new time for all of us, whatever our age, experience or ethnicity. The familiarity of Spring is all around us as new life blossoms in our gardens, hedges, fields and woods. However, the world feels strange as the secure routines of our lives have been laid aside.

**"a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3 v 4)** We seek God's help to deal with the helter skelter of our emotions as we pass through this time and give thanks for special moments like a phone conversation which lightens our mood, perhaps one we may not have had normally. Let us be aware each day of brightening someone else's life in whatever small way is within our means to do. We also hold in mind and prayer, those who no longer feel like laughing or dancing, those for whom light has been extinguished, like a candle in the dark. We pause and remember those for whom the world has become a dark place.

**"a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them" (Ecclesiastes 3 v 5a)** Stones feel harsh and unyielding. I'd rather think about Jesus's teaching on the Kingdom of heaven in which he talked about the mustard seed, a tiny little thing which grew and grew until it was so huge "the birds of the air could nest in its branches" **(Luke 13 v18-19)**.

It doesn't seem like the time for gathering right now. It's not even harvest so we can't think about gathering in the corn. As it is spring the image of scattering the mustard seed is perhaps enough. However, if we think hard enough there may be some gathering to be done. We can "gather our thoughts" and add them to our prayers, knowing God is always listening even when we forget He is. We have lots of opportunities to think, through the conversations we have, the things we read, music we listen to and the short walks we do. Our slower pace of life is an opportunity to ponder on ourselves, others and God. What sort of world do we want at the end of this? What sort of world would better reflect God's loving relationship with us? What needs to change?

**"a time to embrace and a time to refrain" (Ecclesiastes 3 v 5b)** We thank God if we have someone in our household we can still embrace and pray for those who can't physically embrace anyone at this time. Let's remember there are other ways to embrace, by listening on the phone or helping out in safe ways. Our world may have shrunk but God's love hasn't and He still provides ways for us to experience and share it.

**"a time to search and a time to give up" (Ecclesiastes 3 v 6)** We continue to seek God's way in the quiet but sometimes we feel like giving up because we are despondent, afraid or demotivated. These days echo the words in our Covenant service, "Let me be full. Let me be empty." Feeling empty isn't a failure though. It's a pause, a step on the way, a stillness through which God waits for us whilst surrounding us with His love. Nature gives us examples, like the swan which sits so still and patiently on its nest, waiting for weeks and weeks for its young to hatch. We can learn from the swan.

**"a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend" (Ecclesiastes 3 v 6b -7a)** Well, there's a lot of this sort of thing going on just now as we busy ourselves with all manner of sorting, tidying and mending those things we never normally get round to - drawers, cupboards, garages, lofts, emails, photos etc etc. There are lovely moments to be had as we rediscover long forgotten things. Let's remember to have a productive throwing away as we strive to recycle what we no longer have a use for. We also need to be thankful for those possessions we do appreciate as we read about, and see, the poverty and deprivation all around us. Unjust social and political systems are what need to be torn down. Perhaps the restrictions on buying non essential items can free us to reflect whether we need as much as we used to think we did. Let us, with God's guidance, be more aware of the damage our greed does to the environment.

God can give us peace to reflect on the past, imagination to have ideas for the future but, especially, to live in the moment. We can listen to the wind in the trees, to birdsong which fills our gardens and streets, see the changing sunlight on water, smell flowers and herbs, taste what we eat and touch each other in ways which bring comfort and hope because..... "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of people..... I know that everything God does will endure for ever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it." **(Ecclesiastes 3 v 10b and 14a) Amen**